DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 559 CG 021 570

AUTHOR Kahn, Beverly B.; Kahn, Wallace J.
TITLE Expressive Writing in Counseling: Student Authored Books.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Counseling and Development (Boston, MA, March 15-18, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Authors; Children; Classroom Techniques; *Counseling Techniques; *Descriptive Writing; Elementary Secondary Education; *Emotional Adjustment; *Family Problems; Group Counseling; Individual Counseling; School Counseling; *Writing (Composition)

ABSTRACT

This document describes and illustrates an approach to expressive writing which employs student-authored books--"I Am The Author Books" (ITABs)--for use in individual and group counseling with children. It begins with a brief review of pertinent literature on expressive writing as a counseling intervention, and then describes experiences with ITABs. A case example describing the writing of a book on death and loss by a fourth-grade girl whose young sister died in a home accident is used to illustrate the technique. Following this example, other possible uses for ITABs are discussed and examples of other types of problems children can write about are given. The need to alter the format and process depending on the client's age, counseling needs, learning style, and perception of self is acknowledged. The tendency for young children to be highly receptive to this counseling technique is described and it is suggested that authoring a book helps these children to feel important, provides a medium with which they are familiar and comfortable, gives them the feeling that they are helping others, allows them to nurture "native imagery" through creative energy, and leads to self-discovery through self-expression. The resistance to ITABs by older children and young adolescents is discussed and strategies counselors can use to assauge this resistance are listed. The use of ITABs in group sessions or with an entire class is discussed. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED305559

Expressive Writing in Counseling: Student Authored Books

CG 021570

Beverly B. Kahn
Wallace J. Kahn
West Chester University
West Chester, Pennsylvania

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Wallace J. Kahn
Beverly B. Kahn

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Introduction to Model-Expressive Writing

This article will describe and illustrate one approach to expressive writing which employs student authored books (I Am The Author Books, or ITAB's) for individual and group counseling as well as group guidance. After a brief review of pertinent literature on expressive writing as a counseling intervention, the authors will offer their experiences with ITAB's. This personal exposition will be followed by broader descriptions of the applications and implications of using ITAB's in counseling and guidance.

Expressive Writing in Education and Counseling

A mastery of writing for young children, while a gradual process, helps them develop control over language and communication in school. Foormerly writing in schools was geared mainly to English programs with content dealing with subject matter; however, in recent years schools have enlarged the scope of writing content to encompass affective education. Because language has a firm place in the curriculum and mobilizes all the psychological apparatus, written expression holds great appeal for educators and counselors (Brand, 1987).

Writing is a powerful way for children to understand themselves as thinking, feeling responsible individuals (Brand, 1987). Expressive writing is inherently therapeutic. Through writing, Dehouske (1979) suggests that children have a chance to express fears, anxieties, miseries, and hopes. She further states, "Creative writing can be a disguise for self-revelation." Brand (1987) corroborates that writing holds its power due to cumulative stimuli, including cognition, impulses, feelings and images. At a deeper level, writing enhances awareness by (a) helping individuals organize their inner selves, (b) contributing to personal integration and self-validation, and (c) providing catharctic emotional release (Brand, in press).

The range of writing format therapeutically used by elementary counselors varies from very loose, spontaneous writing to more systematically planned writing. Writing can be employed with individual counseling, small group counseling and even classroom guidance. Further, the writing can be incorporated within various stages of the counseling process, in order to explore, set goals, or use as a form of intervention or evaluation. Some examples of such writing include monitering baseline behavior in notebooks, writing in sessions, journal-keeping (Progoff, 1975; Fulwiler, 1987), the dialogue journal, in which child and counselor correspond, poetry (Mazza, 1981), creative writing, letter-writing, and systematically-planned writing.

I Am The Author Books (ITAB's)

The writing process described in this article, student authored books, I Am The Author Books (ITAB'S) moves the child through the therapeutic process by first assigning the as the expert in his own problematic area. Then the counselor leads the child through a process of expressive writing from which the child describes the origins, experiences, and adjustment strategies in coping with his own difficulty. This product becomes the child's I Am The Author Book.

The process of creating an ITAB may be best described by narrating an actual book that was guided by one of the authors.

A few years ago during the Christmas week, a family in one of the authors' school had a preschooler die in a tragic home accident. A fourth-grade sister and the author began individual counseling throughout the winter and spring months, while the family was involved in a community-based loss support group. As their therapeutic relationship grew, the author became significantly impressed by the child's insight, her acceptance of the grieving process, and her nurturing of her own "inner child" (Whitfield, 1987). At the age of ten, she had an in depth understanding of death as part of the life process that the counselor found unique.

In a later session, the counselor asked the child if she would be willing to share this insight with other children. "How", she questioned? By authoring a book with the counselor that would share her experience, thoughts, and feelings, so that other children who had suffered loss would be comforted in the sharing and might learn in the process. Visibly the child brightened at the prospect. In effect, she had become the expert and was challenged with the task ahead.

During the next eight weeks the child and counselor labored over the authoring of this book in weekly sessions. Because this was in the counselor's "pre-computer era", the child dictated the book to the counselor as she typed the pages. The term "labored" is used because the process of writing was very slow, but reflecting back, very necessary. Subsequent books created by this counselor and other children have been written quickly, but much depends on the individual child's problem, style and pace for healing.

Initially the counselor posed the question, " What would be helpful for other children to know if they had someone in their family die?" In essence, the child was asked, "What do you need to know?", "What have you learned?", and "What is still bothering you?". A rough outline was made of the chapters, with each page approximately one chapter. During each session a chapter was created. Other students

have chosen to organize their books chronologically in time.

The counselor's role was to facilitate writing through listening and reflecting. In responding to the child's needs, frequently the entire outline of the book was altered. Reflecting back, the counselor and child were re-navigating the grieving process and each detour allowed the child to come to a new understanding. She offered many original insights for exploration that had not come out of traditional counseling sessions. For example, her fear of sleeping in the room she shared with her sister, and her regret that as the pain dissipated so did some of her memories.

"When Someone You Love Dies"

" I used to be really brave, but now I'm not so brave. It's really hard to be alone. Sometimes I'm afraid to be alone in dark places. Now there is no one to talk to or play with, sometimes. "

"Sometimes my sister used to get more attention than me. Now I get the attention because I'm the only girl. I like it, but I wish that Sarah was back. It reminds me that she's not here. "

G.H.

Additionally the counselor tried to integrate the child's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors to create congruency. With other children's books a more directive approach has been used, depending on their needs, and elements have been introduced into the book outline that will help them achieve counseling goals.

The child explored other children's books on loss in the library to gain an understanding of what to include, and in the process learned more about the issue. She chose to include photos of her sister in the book and the selection of these photos by the family was a catharsis in itself. Her family supported her authoring in many ways and when she completed the book, she proudly gave each family member a signed copy. A copy was put in the school library, a copy was given to her teacher, and her support group requested that the book be published in their national newsletter.

The process of authoring for this child was highly therapeutic. In following years, the author was moved to hear that the child shared copies on many occasions with school-mates and teachers who suffered loss.

Individual, Small Group, and Classroom Applications

The application described above is a typical illustration of

writing ITAB books; however, the format and process will be altered depending upon the individual's age, counseling needs, learning style and perception of self. The books have focused on such concerns as changing families, living in an alcholic family, retention, loss, terminal illness, peer relationship conflicts, learning disabilities, school-avoidance, and new school adjustment problems. The topics for books are as varied as the referring-problems of children.

The authors have found young children to be highly receptive to the production of self-authored books, even when traditional counseling interventions were unsuccessful. For these children, the creation of the book (a) makes them important (the expert), (b) is a medium with which they have familiarity and comfort, (c) gives them the feeling that they are helping others (d) allows them to nurture what Sylvia Ashton Warner terms "native imagery" (Landrum, 1974) through creative energy, and (e) leads to self-discovery through self-expression.

Older childen, approaching adolescence may be more resistant to the process. Their entire school days are filled with writing, some of which is not too successful. A component of their resistance pertains to vulnerability. Putting words on the page, expresses to the world in black and white their vulnerabilities. Mack and Skjei (1974) contrast speech, which can be retracted, modified, and denied, but not so with writing. To help assuage the resistance of the older child, the following strategies have found success when creating student authored books:

1. The counselor's attitude of acceptance, non-rejection, and empathy is imperative.
2. The value of self-authored books can be described in this fashion, "Through writing, feelings that are bothering us deep inside can be placed on the page and in the process we understand them, and they are not as frightening".
3. Before the session, students jot "key words" to explore with the counselor in the chapter.
4. Students assume pen names to maintain anonymity.

The method of the actual writing may vary from dictation, using a tape recorder with later transcription, computer, to student writing. Dictating to the counselor may be the method of choice with younger children, learning disabled, and resistant counselees. Children have occasionally prepared the writing during the week and explored the results at the session. A "novel" approach by a student in an Arizona school was presenting a spontaneous ITAB to the counselor concerning fears at night (Guerin, 1989). (This certainly consistitutes complete referral information!) This same counselor has worked with Apache children, translating their ITAB'S to their native language.

Illustrating the ITAB may take varied forms. Counselor and children's drawings, photographs, cartoons, graphics, even thumb-print ink art have further expressed the personal message of student authored books. When considering children's drawings, Furth, (1988) suggests that they express tremendous amounts of information about psychic contents. Furth, a Jungian theorist, promotes that drawings have a cathartic effect, and that cartharsis allows the symbol to move inner psychic energy and begin the healing process. This source is highly recommended to counselors who wish to explore meaning in children's drawings.

"The Second Time In Second Grade Makes Me First!"
"In September I went to Miss R's second grade. She was a new teacher in my school. In my class were three boys who repeated. It was good to have some people that I knew from last year. Some of my friends went on so I had to make new friends. If you want to make new friends, ask them to play, share your lunch, or sit next to them."
U.K.

" Emily's Change"
" Emily gets lots more smiles from her teacher now. And her friends are happy Emily is not breaking the "NO TALKING" rule. That used to make them nervous! "And you know what else? I'm getting my work finished now!"
E.K.

The process of writing ITAB'S within the structure of small group counseling is similar to the individual process. The focus of the ITAB may be unstructured and determined by the needs and dynamics of the group. In this instance, students through a cooperative effort decide on the common concern, develop strategies for problem-solving and determine a process for the book (Guerin, 1989). In a more structured focus, students with a particular problem, such as living in a changing family through divorce, meet in a small group and create a book out of common concerns, issues, and strategies. Helpful models to be considered for such structured workbooks include S. Blakeslee Ives' and D. Fassler's The Divorce Workbook-A Guide for Kids & Families and Claudia Black's My Dad Loves Me, My Dad Has A Disease.

"Changing Families Book"
" some problems and solutions

missing parents or things at the other place
- call the parent that is not with you
- take some things to the other house
- write a letter
- keep a picture
- talk with someone about the thing or person you miss"

4th Grade Changing Families Group

ITAB'S created with entire classes still meet children's individual needs and enable them to share developmental concerns. The formats are varied according to the age and issue. Subject matter may be preventative and remedial. Following the reading of Quick as a Cricket by A. Wood, a beautifully illustrated book in which a young child contrasts his personal characteristics with imaginary animals, students in a first grade create an ITAB in which each child creates his own page with analogy "I am as .....". The book is kept in the classroom throughout the year with blank pages at the end, in which new transfer students may add their page and feel a part of the whole. Another variation of classroom student authored books involves middle-school students in an "at risk" Alternative Class in Pennsylvania. Teacher and Counselor, in a team approach help students create autobiographies. The counselor plays a major part in helping students edit and explore written work (Snyder & Eutweiler, 1989).

Wood, (1987) suggests that there are many ways to integrate Language Arts and Guidance.

Conclusion

Within the trusting therapeutic relationship of counselor and child, the ITAB, student authored books, provide a powerful tool to enable children to explore concerns by becoming experts and sharing their own unique experience, problem-solving, and successful strategies. Because of the individualized format, ITAB'S meet the counseling needs of a diverse population of students, dealing with remedial and preventative concerns. With the child and parents' consent, these ITAB'S can be used in counseling with other children, incorporated into developmental units, used as a library resource, and employed to help sensitize significant others to the unique needs and perceptions of the child.

References

Black, Claudia (1987). *My Dad Loves Me, My Dad Has A Disease.* Phila.: Cooperative Press.

Blakeslee Ives, Sally & Fassler, David (1987). *The Divorce Workbook- A Guide for Kids and Families.* Phila: Cooperative Press.

Brand, Alice (1987). Writing as Counseling. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, 21, 266-275.

Brand, Alice (in press). Hot cognitions: Emotions and writing behavior. *Journal of Advanced Composition.*

Dehouske, Ellen J. (1979). Original writing: A therapeutic tool in working with disturbed adolescents. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 67-78.

Fulwiler, Toby (1987). *The Journal Book.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/ Cook.

Furth, Greg, M. (1988). *The Secret World of Drawings.* Boston: Sigo.

Guerin, M. (1989) Personal correspondence.

Landrum, Roger (1974). *A Day Dream I Had at Night: Teaching Children to Make their own Readers.* Wash. D.C.: Teachers & Writers Cooperative.

Mack, Karin & Skjei, Eric (1974) *Overcoming Writing Blocks.* Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc.

Mazza, Nicholas (1981). The use of poetry in treating the troubled adolescent. *Adolescence.* 16, 403-408.

Progoff, Ira (1975) *At the Journal Workshop.* New York: Dialogue House.

Snyder, L. & Eutweiler, L. (1989) Personal correspondence.

Whitfield, Charles (1988). *Healing the Child Within.* Deerfield, Fla.: Health Communications, Inc.

Wood, Audrey (1982). *Quick as a Cricket.* Singapore: Child's Play.

Wood, Sally (1987). Language Arts and Guidance: An Integrated Approach. *The School Counselor.* 35, 48-50.

Additional Readings

Castillo, Gloria (1974). *Left-Handed Teaching: Lessons in Affective Education.* New York: Holt, Rinehart,Winston.

Edwards, Betty (1979). *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain.* Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc.

Hougate, Lynn (1988). *Building Self-Esteem Through the Writing Process.* Berkeley, CA: Bay Area Writing Project.

Kirby, Dan & Liner, Tom (1988). *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/ Cook.

Nelson, Richard (1987). Graphics in Counseling. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, 22,17-29.

Simon, Sidney, Hauley, Robert, & Britton, David (1973). *Composition for Personal Growth: Values Clarification Through Writing.* New York: Hart.